

CHARTER
of the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORENSIC SCIENCE
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
NATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

A. Official Designation

The Subcommittee on Forensic Science (Subcommittee) is hereby established by action of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) Committee on Science (COS).

B. Purpose and Scope

Background

Forensic science has been a critical tool in solving innumerable crimes throughout the Nation's history. Each day, our Nation's forensic examiners analyze evidence in order to provide scientific explanations to criminal justice proceedings. This work plays a key role in identifying and exonerating individuals suspected of perpetrating crimes, as well as identifying victims of natural and man-made disasters. When the public, prosecutors, defendants, and the courts afford respect to such analyses, they place their faith in the scientific validity and reliability underlying those analyses and the objective interpretation of that evidence by trained experts.

In 2006, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) issued a grant to the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies to establish a Forensic Science Committee to study the forensic sciences and their application throughout the Nation. The resulting analysis built upon prior NIJ studies in 1999 and 2004, as well as several other studies. In February of 2009, the NRC completed its work and issued a final report entitled *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. The report concluded that the scientific practices underlying many forensics disciplines are in many respects wanting. It provided a number of recommendations on how to improve the scientific foundations of the field, which are so important to its ongoing and future credibility. This Subcommittee is being created to assess the practical challenges of implementing those recommendations and advise the White House on how best to achieve the goals outlined in the NRC report.

Functions

The purpose of the Subcommittee is to advise and assist the COS, NSTC, and other coordination bodies of the Executive Office of the President on policies, procedures and plans related to forensic science in the national security, criminal justice, and medical examiner/coroner systems at the local, state and federal levels. Emphasis will be placed on developing practical and timely approaches to enhancing the validity and reliability of the federal government's undertakings in forensic science and medical examinations and on how the Federal government, in collaboration with other entities, can help ensure that regional, state and local entities adopt best practices in forensic sciences. The Subcommittee will facilitate a strong, coordinated effort across federal agencies to identify and address important federal policy, program and budget matters, as well as potential activities to improve research, training and education, accreditation and certification, protocol testing, methods development, scientific validation, uncertainty measurement, standards, uniformity of forensic science terminology and reporting, and outreach needs. The Subcommittee serves as part of the internal deliberative process of the NSTC, as defined in Executive Order 12881. Reporting to and directed by the COS, the Subcommittee's overarching goal will be to lead an interagency assessment of the Federal government's ability to implement or promote the implementation of the recommendations in the NRC report and develop timely and specific recommendations for doing so.

To achieve this goal, the Subcommittee shall:

- Inventory and analyze activities already underway aimed at addressing forensic science challenges
 - Catalog internal and external recommendations on how to improve the methods and implementation of local, state and federal forensic science services;
 - Identify existing and planned private and governmental efforts whose goals are to improve the methods and implementation of forensic science services;
- Develop strategic plans for the improvement of forensic science capacity, infrastructure, standards and quality management, with particular attention to priorities in the 2009 NRC report, including
 - Prioritization of and increased support for research, development, testing, and evaluation activities;
 - Development of uniform standards for collection, terminology, reporting, and other practices;
 - Implementation of laboratory “Best Practices,” with a focus, as deemed appropriate, on accreditation and certification;
 - Assuring that forensic laboratories have an appropriate degree of independence from prosecutors and law enforcement agencies;
 - Improving education and training;
 - Enhancing technology transfer to state/local/tribal and independent forensic science service providers; and
 - Address other items identified through the Subcommittee’s analysis

Subcommittee co-chairs, consistent with the Committee’s endorsement, will recommend action on major issues to the Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy, for approval or consultation with other components of the Executive Office of the President as appropriate.

Membership

The following NSTC departments and agencies are represented on the Subcommittee:

Department of Commerce
Department of Defense
Department of Energy
Department of Homeland Security
Department of the Interior
Department of Justice
Department of Labor
Department of the Treasury
Environmental Protection Agency
Intelligence Community
National Institutes of Health
National Science Foundation
Smithsonian Institution
United States Postal Service

The following organizations in the Executive Office of the President shall also be represented on the Subcommittee:

Domestic Policy Council
Office of Management and Budget
Office of Science and Technology Policy
National Security Council
White House Counsel

The Subcommittee co-chairs may designate additional representation from other Executive organizations, departments and agencies. The Subcommittee may also utilize the Science and Technology Policy Institute to provide assistance in meeting these tasks.

Private Sector Interface

The Subcommittee may seek advice from the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology and will recommend to the Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy, the nature of additional private sector advice needed to accomplish its mission. The Subcommittee may also interact with and receive ad hoc advice from various private-sector groups as consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Termination Date

Unless renewed by the COS prior to its expiration, the Subcommittee shall terminate no later than September 31, 2011.

Determination

I hereby determine that the formation of the Subcommittee on Forensic Science is in the public interest in connection with the performance of duties imposed on the Executive Branch by law, and that such duties can best be performed through the advice and counsel of such a group.

Approved

Dr. John Holdren; Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy

Dr. Arden Bement; Director, National Science Foundation

Dr. Raynard S. Kington; Acting Director, National Institutes of Health